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ABSTRACT

The university is a major intervention in the lives of its students as it seeks to socialize them into society's future needs. Organizational climate or culture has a major impact on the motivation of students as it designs their role experiences through it organizational requirements. Stress related problems arise from the individual's life space and treatment of the symptoms does not change the source of the problem. Coping effectively with a potential stressor means it does not produce a stress reaction. One of the most powerful coping mechanisms to reduce the impact of role stressors lies in redefinition of the situation itself so that the role demands do not undermine one's capacity to cope with the potential stressors. The Quality of Life Stress Survey measures four basic life style needs which vary for individuals but must be fulfilled if the student is to identify with the role and be motivated to put forth the effort needed to carry out the role effectively. Role stressors can be modified through programs of role clarification, simplification, enrichment, and support groups, once the survey reflects where the organization needs to make changes in roles. Universities may suffer from faculty specialization and formalization. If universities are to carry out their mandate to provide an organization climate within which students can develop into healthy citizens the Diagonal Conference is a helpful tool to overcome bureaucratic stressors that are obstacles to student development. (ABL)

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An Alternate Approach to Retention and Healthier Student Roles

[Charles W. Nelson]

Introduction

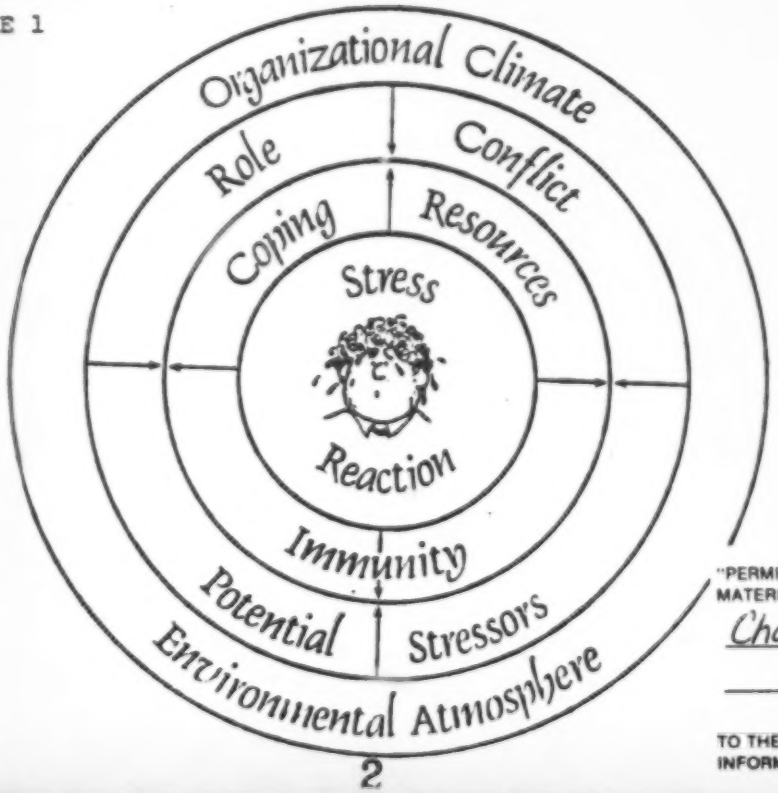
The university is a major intervention in the lives of its students as it seeks to socialize them into society's future needs. Organizational climate or culture has a major impact on the motivation of students as it designs their role experiences through its organizational requirements. However, national statistics for state colleges show that only 40 - 50 percent of entering freshmen graduate within eight semesters.

What has the role to do with student problems like alcoholism, drugs, overweight, depression, and drop-outs? These stress related problems arise from the individual's life space and treatment of the symptoms does not change the source of the problem.

Dimensions of Student Life Space and Stress Reaction

Of course we all recognize that environment can be stressful and that we must learn to live with it--but what are we doing to help the student live with it or change it so it is more livable? In Figure 1 below we have displayed an overview of the social counterparts to the physical process creating the stress reaction which leads to various forms of illness (Environmental Atmosphere creates Potential Stressors such as toxins that if not buffered by Immunity result in Stress Reaction). Our concern here is with the social dimensions of how the Organizational Climate or culture creates Role Conflicts for students which if not buffered by adequate Coping Resources result in a Stress Reaction.

FIGURE 1



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Let us start with a discussion of the familiar concept of the Stress Reaction itself.

Nature of the Stress Reaction Syndrome

In 1926 two major contributions to stress research were developed separately and later merged to give us insight into stress related illness. Walter Cannon, a psychologist, identified an endocrine stress reaction system which prepared the body for flight or fight situations (1953). Hans Selye, a physician, after seeing similar common symptoms of illness in patients that did not match any known disease first described this as the "syndrome of just being sick" (1956). Selye later concluded that stressful life events which trigger the endocrine stress reaction system gradually reduce our natural immunities to a wide variety of diseases.

The Stress Reaction Syndrome explains the neuro-endocrine process by which experienced stress becomes a physical illness. The study of the body's own control mechanisms is still in its infancy but Everly and Rosenfeld in their book, The Nature and Treatment of the Stress Response (1981), provide an excellent explanation and treatment of the stress reaction process.

Coping Resources for Potential Stressors

Much has been written about coping--meaning reducing the stress reaction through relaxation, meditation, humor, and desensitization, but here we wish to focus instead on coping skills and resources to deal with potential stressors in the environment. If we can cope effectively with the potential stressor it does not produce the stress reaction.

The stress reaction syndrome must be activated by some stimulus the individual experiences as a threat, therefore, both psychological and environmental elements trigger the stress reaction syndrome.

Lazarus (1984) does not accept the notion that everyone reacts alike to potential life event stressors, but rather that personality is an essential interpretative link between potential stressors and the neuro-endocrine reactions. He believes that the stress reaction syndrome does not occur unless the environment is interpreted as threatening. Lazarus and Folkman in their book, Stress, Appraisal, and Coping (1984) make a good case for the interpretation of the stimulus as the product of a negotiation between the individual and his environment. However, "symbolic interactionists" would also extend the negotiation to include "significant others" surrounding one's role position who help define role expectations.

Environmental Stress and Life Style Needs

Sociologists would argue, like Holmes and Rahe (1967), that certain "life events" such as loss of one's income have sufficient common cultural impact to override most personality differences. It is essential to realize that fulfillment of some common basic life style needs are not only important to avoid stress but for motivation and identification with one's organizational role. They serve as the social bonds through which the individual maintains human contact and identification with the institution. Two observations from the literature illustrate for both young and old the seriousness of one of these basic common cultural needs--a sense of security and order.

The University of Illinois Circle Campus is a circular building of several stories and, at first, occupancy was driving students into a frenzy as they tried to find their classrooms until the floors were differentiated by color and other identifying landmarks to provide a sense of security and order about the students' physical environment.

In another study the transfer of nursing home occupants caused a death-loss of nearly 50 percent until patients who were admitted later were prepared ahead by visits to the home and given orientation and choice of roommates to reduce anxiety about where and what the environment was to be.

Life Style Needs and Role-Stress

As illustrated above, one of the most powerful coping mechanisms to reduce the impact of role stressors lies in redefinition of the situation itself so that the role demands do not undermine one's capacity to cope with the potential stressors.

Role conflict expresses itself in many ways as the literature on "person-environment fit" will attest, but when role conflict blocks the fulfillment of basic Life Style Needs underlying the self-concept of the role occupant it is very destructive of coping capacities and often results in compensating addictions and alienation of students.

In the Quality of Life Stress Survey we have measured four basic life style needs which vary for individuals but must be fulfilled if the student is to identify with the role and be motivated to put forth the effort needed to carry out the role effectively. The violation of the first of these basic needs was illustrated above and is described as an Individual Life Style Need below.

Formal Life Style A--High stress scores in this Life Style reveal a strong need for security and a sense of order. This individual tends to be sensitive to

an underlying stressor, "role ambiguity and vagueness," and often tries to cope with it by seeking formal authority for guidance or retreat from responsibility to maintain self-confidence.

Technical Life Style B--High stress scores in this Life Style reveal a strong need for achievement and meaningful work. This individual tends to be sensitive to a different stressor, "role complexity and lack of goals," and often tries to cope with it by expending excessive competitive energy in a persistent search for solutions to ill-defined or unshared problems to maintain self-respect.

Individual Life Style C--High stress scores in this Life Style reveal a strong need for recognition and self-expression. This person tends to be sensitive to yet another stressor, "role rigidity and lack of self expression," and may try to cope with it by becoming a "character" in order to personalize role responsibilities and ignore formal role demands in favor of personality contacts and an exchange of personal favors to maintain self-esteem.

Group Life Style D--High stress scores in this Life Style reveal a strong need for belonging and significant membership. This person tends to be sensitive to another basic stressor, "role isolation," or lack of shared values and group membership and tries to cope with it by the protective support of a few trusted friends and keeping a low profile with a lack of commitment or sharing of any clearly expressed values with others to maintain self-worth.

Releasing Role Occupant from Role Conflict

In Figure 1 which follows we see the stress impact on the role occupant of the various role stressors: ambiguity produces anxiety; complexity produces frustration; rigidity produces depression; and isolation produces alienation.

The role stressors can be modified through programs of role clarification, simplification, enrichment, and support groups, once the survey reflects where the organization needs to make changes in roles. Where individuals have low thresholds for a given role stressor creating high Life Style Stress Scores it may be possible to modify the role and provide support groups to help them cope, or transfer them to a situation without that kind of role demand.

The Quality of Life Stress Survey is a new tool to help improve management effectiveness and produce less role stress related illness. With an effective Health Maintenance Resource Center to guide its usage, the potential for a better quality of life with greater quality and quantity of accomplishment is very possible with fewer health problems and loss of members.

FIGURE 2

Releasing Role Occupant From Role Stress

In order to help the role occupant deal with the different role stressor reactions of anxiety, frustration, depression, and alienation we have provided in Table 2, following the table of feedback scores (Table 1), four alternate group support programs.

Feedback of College Students' Stress Scores and Their
Evaluation of Suggested Stress Reduction Programs

Feedback of Individual Stress Scores and Support Programs

Table 1 which follows illustrates the numerical order in which the individual's computer stress scores are fed back by using the Private Feedback Number that was on the answer sheet tab the individual retained when completing the Survey.

Five typical cases are discussed and stress reduction programs are recommended for each Life Style Need in Table 2. Individuals find their own profile of scores and can recognize from the percentile level which Life Style Needs are significantly higher than the average. These scores indicate the stress reduction program most desirable to join from those presented in Table 2. Stressor areas can be dealt with under any of the four Life Style Stress Reduction Programs.

TABLE 1

*PERCENTILE COMPUTER FEEDBACK OF QUALITY OF LIFE STRESS PROFILE FOR LIFE STYLES AND AREAS
(Use the Private Feedback Number you detached from the Answer Sheet to find your scores)

PRIVATE FEEDBACK NUMBER	LIFE STYLE A RAW PCT	LIFE STYLE B RAW PCT	LIFE STYLE C RAW PCT	LIFE STYLE D RAW PCT	ORG. SETTING RAW PCT	ROLE STRESS RAW PCT	COPE RESR RAW PCT	STRESS REACT RAW PCT	TOTAL STRESS RAW PCT	ALIENA-TION RAW PCT	HEALTH RISK RAW PCT
100044	79-99	78-99	84-99	79-99	69-99	85-99	83-99	83-99	320-99	21-96	19-92
100046	52-37	59-76	51-47	53-49	37-8	64-80	46-28	68-81	215-53	9-4	14-46
100048	65-90	57-67	56-71	54-54	43-23	67-87	52-54	70-86	232-74	14-38	15-58
100051	55-52	55-58	56-71	59-76	58-83	48-29	62-90	57-47	225-66	18-88	13-34
100052	50-29	56-63	52-52	60-80	54-69	51-39	58-79	55-40	218-57	16-61	12-24
100054	53-42	49-29	45-21	48-26	42-20	44-18	50-45	60-57	196058	6-1	15-58

*Percentile scores are based on z-scores and show your relative level of stress compared to the normalized scores of 1245 college students. The 50th percentile is average and over the 75th percentile or under the 25th, merits your attention.

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FEEDBACK INTERPRETATION AND GROUP STRESS REDUCTION PROGRAMS

In the sample Percentile Computer Feedback above we have displayed the Life Style and Stressor Area Scores for seven cases and underlined the scores that were significantly high. For each Life Style we have displayed below a series of four sessions that we feel should be helpful in reducing each stress reaction. These cover: Understanding and Managing Stress Reaction; Providing an opportunity for Learning Coping Skills; Resources for Developing Basic Approaches; and the opportunity to Set Goals in Support Groups. Alienation reflects role dissatisfaction; Health Risk reflects poor health habits.

In the sample cases above the person whose number is 100044 would qualify (High Stress) for all four programs, but must start with only one - we would suggest Life Style A in this case. Individual 100048 should also join in program for Life Style A. Individual 100046 needs Life Style B program and should work on the Role Stress area which is also high. Individual 100051 and 100052 should both join program D and put special effort into two areas- Organizational setting and Coping Methods. Individual 100054 has very low stress in all Styles and Areas, and could join any group to help others develop more effective coping methods while becoming more aware of others Life Style Needs.

Each Stress Reduction program is planned for one hour with about 30 minutes for information presentation and the balance used by the group for experience exercises such as muscle relaxation or social skills and for sharing their reactions with each other under the guidance of a chosen leader for the session- the group may need to devote more than one session to a given topic.

TABLE 2

SUGGESTED GROUP PROGRAMS OF STRESS REDUCTION BY LIFE STYLE NEEDS

Program Development in Support Groups	Life Style A Need for Security	Life Style B Need for Achievement	Life Style C Need for Recognition	Life Style D Need for Belonging
Understanding and Managing Stress Reaction	Anxiety vs "Managing Stress"	Frustration vs "Controlling Anger"	Depression vs "Building Self-Esteem"	Alienation vs "Developing Affiliat
Group Activity: Stress Reaction Exercises and Sharing Insights.	Relaxation	Meditation	Assertiveness	Sharing
Learning Coping Skills	Time-Management via "Thinking Skills"	Achieving Potential via "Achievement Skills"	Ego-Enhancement via "Self-Acceptance"	Communication via "Interaction Skills
Group Activity: Recognizing Role Needs and Sharing Coping Methods.	Sense of Order	Meaningful Tasks	Self-Expression	Membership Status
Developing Basic Approaches	Clear Objectives via "Focused Listening"	Critical Thinking via "Logical Methods"	Decision-Making via "Personal Commitment"	Group Identificatio via "Active Participatio
Group Activity: Dealing With Role Conflict and Sharing Life Style Changes.	Role Ambiguity	Role Complexity	Role Rigidity	Role Isolation
Setting Goals in Support Groups	Orientation via "Using Regulations"	Goal Clarification via "Career Exploration"	Role Enrichment via "Creative Development"	Support Groups via "Significant Membersh
Group Activity: Transcending Organizational Climate via Support Groups.	Normlessness	Meaninglessness	Estrangement	Anomie

We have outlined only the elements that should be considered in each program but it will be the responsibility of your Program Design Committee to choose from the many packaged sound slide programs or paperbacks that cover these concerns. In any case your Health Maintenance Center should be well stocked with additional literature and resources.

We believe the goal of each of these programs should be not only to educate and involve individuals in stress reduction methods but to help the participants share with each other and build a continuing support group that may well find additional ways to improve health and reduce stress.

Persons who have a low threshold for certain kinds of role stress can, like the miner's canary (which is supersensitive to lack of oxygen) help everyone to recognize potential stressors that others may not be aware of even when these stressors are active agents in creating stress for them. By working in support groups they should not only identify role stressors but come up with constructive solutions for the Program Design Committee's review.

In the last stage of each program "Setting Goals in Support Groups" we suggest learning to transcend the various stressors arising from the Organizational Climate. This is another way of reaching beyond the immediate climate and helping to correct it rather than contributing further to this organizational stressor. For example, where drugs were creating a state of normlessness in a high school a non-user and influential user joined together to form a group that organized the athletes against drugs and developed a new standard for social status in the school.

College Students' Ratings of Program Topics

We would like to present the favorable ratings given by 279 college students who had completed the Quality of Life Stress Survey and then rated these program topics on a five point scale of Useless, Useful, Helpful, Needed, and Essential. Here we would like to discuss just the percentage rating of each topic as "Favorable." We have defined favorable as Helpful, Needed, or Essential. For the first question rating, "Stress Reduction Techniques," we find the majority positive (over 60 percent).

In the area of "Coping Skills" all these skills were acceptable by the majority (over 70 percent).

In "Role Stress Reducers" all methods were well received at over 60 percent. Decision-Making and Clear Objectives were understandably higher at this age.

In the area of "Improving Climate" all four topics were well received. The overall rating of the desirability of having the above workshops offered was

rated favorably by 61.7 percent with only 6.8 percent who felt it would be useless. When we compared High Stress versus Low Stress cases for the same evaluation the programs were much more highly desired by the High Stress students than by Low Stress students.

We believe these favorable ratings would compete well in popularity with our average course offerings.

Organizational Climate Approach to Reduction of Stress

As we have seen in Figure 2 individuals are not living in a social vacuum, but instead live in a web of social interactions fulfilling roles in our society that are maintained through social bonds which reward their performance. The organizational approach would have a far better chance of success in changing behavior than the individual "one on one" method not only because of the number of contacts and length of time involved but because of the kinds of motivation that can be brought to bear on the role occupant. Concepts and methods for improving the organizational leadership climate are discussed below and in Nelson and Smith's article, "A Frame of Reference for the Measurement of Institutional Leadership Concepts and the Analysis of System States," 1976.

Modern Bureaucratic Structures and Alienation

Sociologists study the changing structure and values of society and their impact on the welfare of its members. Max Weber wrote the classic analysis of the industrial society as contrasted with our earlier agricultural kinship society. Weber in defense of bureaucratic organizations presents both the principles of formalization of lines of authority and specialization via the division of labor as the most rational and efficient means of production. The major contender to his appraisal was Karl Marx who presented the thesis that if labor did not collectively own the means of production the membership would lose their dignity as human beings and become alienated from society. Joachim Israel in his book, Alienation - From Marx to Modern Sociology (1977), makes a critical review of both classical and modern writings concerning the impact of our social structures on human values.

Our concern here is not just with the capacity of the organizational culture to create alienation but instead to follow Durkheim's admonition to shift from "mechanical" to "organic" solidarity and thus reduce both alienation and stress.

Further readings on stress resulting from our modern bureaucratic structures will be found in abundance. Among them Victor Thompson's Bureaucracy and the Modern World (1976) is a good systems analysis and Ralph Hummel's The Bureaucratic Experience (1977) provide a sensitive and perceptive exposure of the psychological control of bureaucracy over the individual citizen.

Do Universities Suffer from Bureaucratic Structures?

After all, the university is a "community of scholars" not a hierarchy of paid employees, or is it?

Specialization - The fast expansion of college students in the late 1960s called for many changes. Departments sought to update themselves by hiring specialists in various fields, but, unfortunately, these specialists were often more technicians than doctors of philosophy and this has created such communication barriers within departments that the overall goals of these departments frequently have been lost. (I am acquainted with one department in a major university which over-specialized to the extent that it no longer stood for a nationally recognized school of thought as it had previously and even could not carry out faculty departmental meetings with any sense of purpose.) Students taking the Quality of Life Stress Survey show highest stress in the sophomore year while trying to make sense of their major and again as seniors when they try to find any practical use of their major for a job. This organizational stress in the curriculum is reflected by advisors who only fill out forms to assure students' graduation and by professors who cannot guide students as either mentors or helpers with real life values--this is stress from specialization in universities.

Formalization - Legislatures in the late 1960s, after the student rebellion, decided that more formal leadership was needed for control on the campus and greatly increased hierarchy and formalization developed. University hierarchies proliferated and were further handicapped by a lack of adequate career lines for administrators. Many of the early university presidents were drawn heavily from political science administration which was geared to monitor low level civil service employees, not dedicated professionals. As these failed and were rejected by faculty various opportunists arose from the ranks too misguided by an excessive legal counsel geared to federal legislation and civil rights movements to really provide leadership. In a review of university leadership Clark Kerr noted that Robert Hutchins at the University of Chicago represented the last significant attempt to guide university leadership. Little wonder that students feel administration is often too bureaucratic, distant, and uncaring to understand their problems.

Organization as a More Effective Unit of Change

In 1949, at Harvester Central School, supervisors were brought in from 19 different plants and we discovered that leadership training washed off and that each plant had its own distinct leadership pattern to which the supervisors readjusted upon their return. (Valenti found that these differences in organizational climate also existed in schools.)

Individual change did not last at Harvester but in a similar program at the maintenance plant of United Airlines, with top management leadership, four times as much change was accomplished and over a three year study it stabilized at twice the accomplishment of the former individual approach. The unit of change is the organization not the isolated individual out of his role context, and we must apply this wisdom to stress reduction through health maintenance programs if we desire success.

This breakthrough changed the leadership literature from management development to organizational development and this is beginning to happen in Health Care Delivery Systems but so far it has focused only on financial and structural aspects.

Diagonal Conference Methods to Overcome Bureaucratic Barriers

Industrial sociologists have long noted that one of the greatest barriers to open communication is the "man-Boss" vertical relationship and the inter-departmental horizontal relationship. In the superior-subordinate vertical relationship there is a good deal of filtering, editing, and distortion of communication, and horizontal communication between departments is hampered by "in-group thinking" and specialization of interest and ideas. To overcome these barriers to effective problem-solving we organized diagonal conference groups to discuss organizational problems and goals (see Figures 3 and 4 as examples in formal and professional organizations).

In these diagonal conferences, the common concern was the "organization as a whole" which had been the lonely responsibility of the administration. The ideas that flowed from these diagonal groups were beyond anything that occurred before in any problem-solving conference. One industrial plant with 15 diagonal conference groups gained $25,000,000 in one year! What happened was that we released bound up human resources and focused them on a common goal and developed a solution to the bureaucratic rigidity which was crippling the creative and adaptive potential of the human organization.

FIGURE 3
Formal Organization

THE DIAGONAL CONFERENCE GROUP

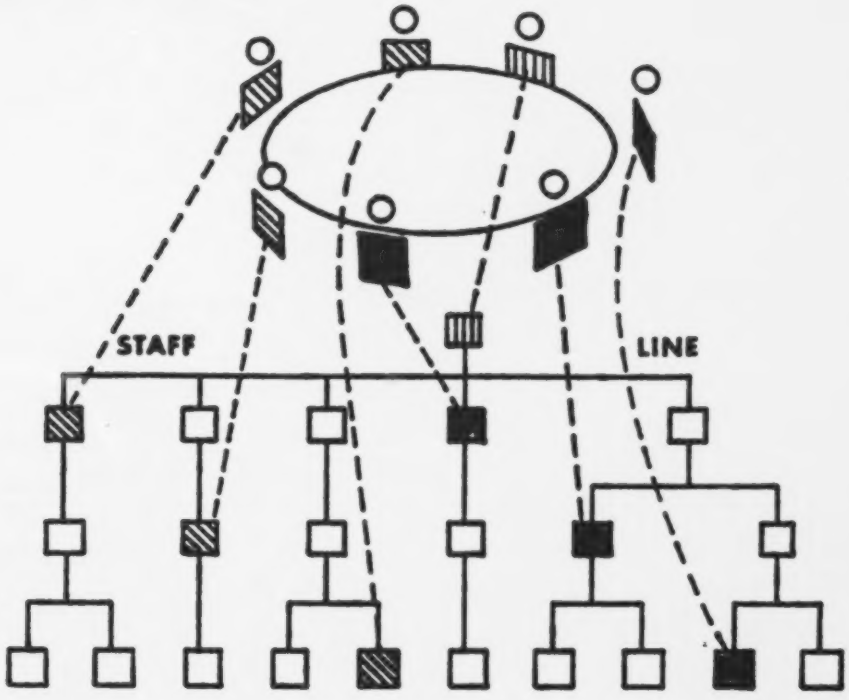
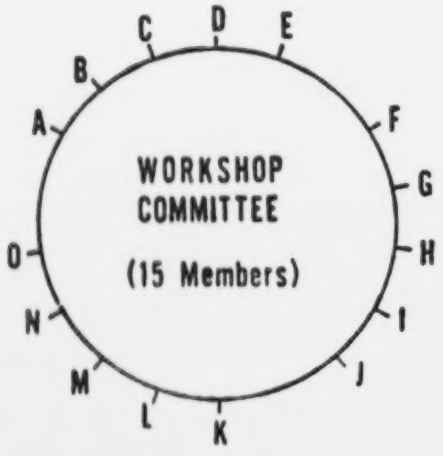


FIGURE 4-Professional Organization

STEP I - INTRODUCE PROBLEM AREA AS AN INVITATION TO CREATE.



Positions A B C D E represent Academic Levels: Member of Academic Affairs Staff; Deans; Chairperson; Grad Faculty Advisor; Graduate Student.

Positions F G H I J represent Faculty Technical Resources from various departments.

Positions K L M N represent Community Liaison persons chosen from our alumni.

Position O represents Rotating Members at Large: from Trustees; Administration; Faculty Executive Committee and Student Body Representatives.

The diagonal conference serves as "man's self-correcting process" for rebuilding aging bureaucracies without destroying the structure for efficient operation - it lets the membership create needed changes. If universities are to carry out their mandate to provide an organizational climate within which students can develop into healthy citizens the Diagonal Conference is a helpful tool to overcome bureaucratic stressors that are obstacles to student development.*

Summary

The Quality of Life Stress Survey identifies four basic Life Style Needs that serve as the social bonds motivating students to fulfill their roles and identify with the organization.

The QLSS also identifies four basic sources of stress which help define the environmental demands that may cause students to become frustrated and alienated. With this baseline information available to the individual and the organization a program for improving the quality of life can be developed to help students as they make the transition from home to productive roles in society.

A comprehensive 80 page Manual on the Quality of Life Stress Survey covering its rationale, norms, reliability, and validity together with guidelines for improving the Quality of Life for potential low morale students is available from the author.

Workshops are also available to assist program design committee members in using the Quality of Life Stress Survey and Leadership Practices Inventory as guidelines in developing their own health maintenance programs.

For further information write: Charles W. Nelson, Ph.D., Management Research Associates, R.R. 25, Box 26, Terre Haute, IN 47802. Ph (812) 894-2559

*For further details on the Diagonal Conference read Nelson and Smith's article, "Achieving Institutional Adaptation Using Diagonally Structured Information Exchange" 1974 in a University of Chicago reprint from Human Relations Journal, Vol. 27, No. 2